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New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

In the absence of the President, Mrs. Mladineo (Croatia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 58

Operational activities for development: operational activities for development of the United Nations system: special commemorative meeting devoted to the sixtieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund

The Acting President: This morning the General Assembly will hold a special commemorative meeting devoted to the sixtieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund, under agenda item 58, in accordance with resolution 61/20, of 28 November 2006.

Members will recall that, at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 13 September 2006, the General Assembly decided to allocate agenda item 58 to the Second Committee under heading B of the agenda, entitled "Promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and recent United Nations conferences".

In order for the General Assembly to hold the special commemorative meeting today, may I take it that the Assembly wishes to also consider agenda item 58 directly in plenary meeting under heading B of the agenda?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In the absence of objection, may I further take it that the Assembly agrees to proceed immediately to holding the special commemorative meeting under agenda item 58?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: We shall proceed accordingly.

Statement by the Acting President

The Acting President: On behalf of Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, I am honoured to welcome members to this special meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). I would also like to welcome all the children who are with us today. They have a special role and responsibility in this commemorative event, because they are representing children from all over the world.

As we have seen in the film shown in the Hall moments ago, UNICEF has worked on behalf of children — who frequently are the most vulnerable among us — from the earliest days of the Organization. Over the past 60 years, UNICEF has shown us that the rights of children to survival, protection and participation are central to development. We will not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals

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unless we ensure that those fundamental rights of the child are realized.

The name UNICEF has always been synonymous with action, from its early relief work for children affected by war — which continues to this day — to campaigns against disease and for the promotion of child health, nutrition and education in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the child survival and development revolution and the drive for universal child immunization in the 1980s, its work for child rights in the 1990s as a force behind the adoption and near universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its work today to achieve results for children through the Millennium Development Goals.

None of those achievements would have been possible without the dedicated staff who have served UNICEF and the children of the world so well over the past 60 years. Those women and men deserve our special thanks. In particular, we should pay tribute to those who, in the call of duty, have lost their lives working in difficult conditions in the field.

The name UNICEF is also synonymous with advocacy. Its national committees and networks of volunteers in 37 countries have sold millions of greeting cards to raise funds and awareness of UNICEF's work. Beginning with the appointment of the actor Danny Kaye as its first Goodwill Ambassador, UNICEF has relied on such ambassadors to spread the word about children's issues.

UNICEF was closely involved in the historic World Summit for Children, which took place in 1990 in the General Assembly Hall. UNICEF was also a driving force behind the 2002 General Assembly special session on children. That culminated in a Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children". The Assembly will review progress towards the goals of "A world fit for children" in 2007.

In congratulating UNICEF today for 60 years' worth of achievement, let us also remind ourselves that we have much more to accomplish before we can say that we live in a world fit for children. Too many children still die of preventable diseases, go hungry, are denied their right to an education or are forced into early marriage or hazardous work. Too many children have been orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. And too many of them will never experience a childhood.

On this sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations Children's Fund, let us deliver on the promises that we have made in this very Hall to the children of the world.

I now give the floor to Mr. Chen Jian, Under-Secretary-General of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, do deliver a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Mr. Chen: I have the honour today to read out the following message of the Secretary-General to the special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the sixtieth anniversary of UNICEF:

> "In the 10 years I have served as Secretary-General, I have been privileged to meet UNICEF colleagues all around the world. I have seen them do great things for children, on all continents and against all odds. They have given a voice to those children who need it most. They have protected children and helped them to survive and develop. It is largely thanks to UNICEF that today we understand better than ever that building a better future begins with children — with ensuring that they are healthy, educated, safe and loved. When given the best possible start in life, children can grow up to realize their greatest potential as adults. UNICEF is dedicated to providing that gateway to a better future.
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> "Over the six decades that have passed since UNICEF's establishment, at the end of the Second World War, UNICEF's advocacy on behalf of children has changed the international discourse, putting a human face on development. Each year, UNICEF's flagship publication has borne witness to the state of the world's children, bringing the world's attention to its youngest citizens. Campaigns for child survival, girls' education and HIV/AIDS have proved models of a broad and deep partnership across agencies. UNICEF's emergency responses have saved the lives of millions of children caught up in wars and natural disasters. Health programmes have saved millions of children from disease, under-nutrition, illness and death. Education programmes have enabled millions to learn what they need to lead full and productive lives. Protection programmes have saved millions from trafficking, sexual exploitation, violence and

abuse. And today, UNICEF's work to realize the rights of all children is at the heart of our efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

"If UNICEF did not exist the world would have to invent it. As the Assembly celebrates this milestone, I extend my profound thanks to the staff and leadership of UNICEF, as well as to the national committees for UNICEF and their Goodwill Ambassadors, for the wonderful partnership we have enjoyed. I know they will keep going strong for many such milestones to come. I will no longer be Secretary-General, but I will always their fan."

The Acting President: Before we proceed, I would like to consult Member States about inviting Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, to make a statement on this occasion.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Ms. Veneman to make a statement at this special commemorative meeting.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Aboubacar Ibrahim Abani, representative of Niger, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Abani (Niger) (*spoke in French*): It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the Group of African States to express our solidarity with UNICEF, which is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary. We believe this to be a very important event, and the culmination of 60 years of struggle on behalf of the rights of children to dignity, protection and well-being.

On this solemn occasion, I would like to express our appreciation and heartfelt congratulations to Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF, and her team for their ongoing determined efforts, which have made it possible for UNICEF to do excellent work. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank and pay tribute to Ms. Carol Bellamy for an entire decade of tireless efforts in the service of suffering children.

UNICEF was the first global organization for children. In the past six decades, UNICEF has made remarkable contributions to developing positions on a wide range of issues affecting children, especially as regards providing greater protection. In that connection, UNICEF has asserted that children have a right to education, health, dignity and protection from violence. Since 2001, UNICEF has quite rightly focused on five priority areas, namely, combating AIDS, vaccination, education for girls, infancy and, lastly, the protection of children in precarious situations.

Too often today, children are the first victims of any difficult situation. Their futures are threatened by the breakdown of the normal social order, which prevents them from attending school and accessing adequate medical care. The fundamental protection for civilians guaranteed by international humanitarian law should be respected, especially when it comes to children. We know that in today's world children are the first victims of hunger and of war — where they are sometimes used as soldiers. The scourge of recruiting children as soldiers should be eradicated from the world. How many young lives have been ruined by forced conscription and abduction, which robs children of their innocence and places them in direct contact with violence — and even making children the perpetrators of violence and murder?

There is a growing and clearer awareness today of the need to provide all the world's children with a good start in life. We welcome the recognition of the fact that ensuring such a beginning for every child is at the heart of all the efforts of UNICEF. Although much has been accomplished, there is still a long way to go.

In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, we must emphasize capacity-building in the poorest countries and consider ways to strengthen the coordination of the delivery of the assistance that has been agreed. Capacity-building makes it possible for individuals, organizations, social groups and communities as a whole to work more efficiently and in a more sustained manner. That is the way to ensure tangible sustained resources. Moreover, capacity-building has a more comprehensive objective: it enables local communities to extricate themselves from the vicious circle of dependence on external assistance.

Education is more than just learning. In many countries — especially in Africa — education serves as a life preserver, in particular for girls. For example, a girl without education runs a higher risk of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS. She will also encounter more

difficulties in keeping her family healthy. The education of girls is growing throughout the world. However, too many girls still receive no education, especially in urban areas. Numerous social and economic factors contribute to preventing girls from having access to schools. We must eradicate, or at least reduce, those factors as much as possible.

In the course of the past six decades, UNICEF has done an excellent job in carrying out its three-fold mission, namely, first of all, to raise awareness of the state of children and women around the world, especially in Africa; secondly, to work on their behalf and promote their rights among the public at large; and, lastly, to raise private funds.

Today's children are tomorrow's adults. That is the simple idea that we must apply in order that younger generations can receive the necessary attention and be protected from mistreatment and abuse, which will make them broken beings for the rest of their lives. Respecting the rights of children today is the sole way of guaranteeing human rights in the future. That is the meaning of UNICEF's mandate, with which Africa fully associates itself. UNICEF's record is real and appreciated. It has been possible thanks to the men and women who have served UNICEF as unambiguous promoters of the rights of children.

In this world of technology, we can certainly do more for our children than we are doing at the moment. There is little excuse for failing to establish a favourable environment in which all children can fully achieve their potential.

In conclusion, on behalf of Africa, I would once again like to thank and congratulate the men and women who have made UNICEF what it is today, including for their generous, courageous and noble efforts on behalf of the children of the world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Hamidon Ali, representative of Malaysia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia): On behalf of the States members of the Asian Group, I am pleased to extend our heartfelt congratulations to the United Nations Children's Fund on the commemoration of its sixtieth anniversary.

Asia has always had strong and abiding relations with UNICEF. In the 1950s, when many of us had newly achieved independence, attention was focused on long-term preventive health care for our children. Efforts in that direction were largely successful, as clearly evident when the yaws disease, which was the world's bane in the 1950s, was successfully eradicated in Asia. That was a considerable achievement, given that more than half of the reported cases of that painful disease were found on our continent alone.

UNICEF's involvement in Asia has evolved since then, taking into account new challenges as well as modalities of cooperation. For example, UNICEF has contributed significantly towards mending the broken lives and spirits of the children left helpless from the waves of despair that hit the region in late 2004. The ray of hope that UNICEF has brought to all the children affected by the tsunami disaster has seen the affected children once more embracing life and moving on. UNICEF's "building back better" post-tsunami recovery plan in Aceh, Indonesia, for instance, is much welcomed. The call for more than 300 new schools to be built there over the next three years has made significant progress. We hope to see all children in the region back in school. There are many other similar examples in that regard.

Lately, we have seen UNICEF reaching out in more ways than its founders could have envisioned. The potential of media such as the Internet — and, recently, mobile phones — has enabled information to be diffused in a manner as never seen, nor imagined, before. While that development certainly poses new challenges, it has at the same time provided UNICEF and its membership an avenue to reach out to children the world over with useful and pertinent information aimed at improving their lives. UNICEF and its membership must therefore continue to work more closely together to harness potential resources such as those.

Once again, on behalf of the Asian Member States, I would like to congratulate the United Nation's Children Fund on 60 years of excellent work, and to assure it of our continued support in the years to come.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Amir Muharemi, representative of Croatia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Muharemi (Croatia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Eastern European Group. At the outset, allow me to express my sincere pleasure at

having been given an opportunity to speak at the sixtieth anniversary of UNICEF.

Let me start by thanking UNICEF in the name of the children of Eastern Europe, who have received help from UNICEF in times of dramatic political changes in that part of the world. Let me also thank UNICEF in the name of their parents, who were themselves children when they received the first-ever shipment of UNICEF emergency aid just after the Second World War.

By making a difference, UNICEF has directly applied the highest ideals of the United Nations. At the beginning of its activities in the region, UNICEF supplied millions of refugees with food and clothing, which saved the lives of many children. As years passed, UNICEF continued to improve children's lives by providing penicillin to hospitals and by accomplishing the eradication of polio in the region.

Not many people are aware that the first UNICEF national committee in Europe was established in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1947. That was followed by the establishment of committees in other countries, including in Bulgaria and Romania. They raised money by selling UNICEF greeting cards, which are equally well known today as a very popular part of UNICEF's information campaigns and funding.

In many countries of the Eastern European region, UNICEF has helped people to maintain safe water sanitation in schools, especially in rural areas. It also began some of the first nutrition programmes in several countries of the region.

No other region of the world has recently gone through the kind of changes experienced by Eastern Europe. Political, economic and social systems have been transformed, some of them following armed conflict. Other countries are still experiencing difficult transition processes.

Unfortunately, children suffer too often in many ways. That is where the work of UNICEF makes a true difference in the everyday lives of children. Although children in most parts of the region no longer need emergency aid, the States of the Eastern European Group highly appreciate the role of UNICEF today. Since the primary needs of children are seen to by their respective Governments, UNICEF can now focus on the needs of specific, more vulnerable groups of children in the region as well as in the world, namely, the disabled, the poorest, those with HIV/AIDS, and victims of trafficking, especially girls.

We have all witnessed how much UNICEF has done for children over the past 60 years and how much it continues to do. UNICEF has helped children to survive, to have access to clean water, to get vaccinated, to stay healthy and to become educated. On many occasions, it has protected them from violence and exploitation.

We especially commend UNICEF's tireless, often dangerous work on behalf of children in armed conflict. Through its disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, UNICEF has targeted around 300,000 child soldiers and helped them simply to become children again.

As many of us are finding ways to join donor countries of our region in helping children in need around the world, we remain aware that there is still a lot to be done for the sake of children and their rights. We, the Eastern European Group of States, remain committed to our children and to the work of UNICEF which we applaud today.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Grenada, Ms. Ruth Elizabeth Rouse, to speak on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States.

Ms. Rouse (Grenada): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Member States of the Latin American and Caribbean Group at this special commemorative meeting devoted to the sixtieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Since the adoption of resolution 57 (I) on 11 December 1946, which established the International Children's Emergency Fund, and resolution 802 (VIII) on 6 October 1953, which changed the name of the organization to what it is today, UNICEF has found innovative ways and means to carry out its mandate. Not only did UNICEF obtain the Nobel Peace Prize in 1965 but it has made significant achievements during these 60 years of operation. From an agency that began as a temporary experiment to provide humanitarian relief to children in the aftermath of the Second World War, through the struggles of the development decades, the silent emergency, the recognition of child rights and, today, keeping children at the heart of

development, we congratulate UNICEF on its historic achievements.

The Latin American and Caribbean Group of countries commends UNICEF for the assistance it has provided over the years since the establishment of its first office in the region in 1948. The infant mortality rate has decreased tremendously in many countries of the region, thanks to the unswerving support of UNICEF and its team of professionals. Our children are our future. Hence, we applaud UNICEF's efforts to better their condition through its funds and programmes.

Much work is left for the countries of the region to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, but with the continued support of UNICEF, many of the MDGs, particularly Goal 4, are attainable and the future does not look so bleak. The Latin American and Caribbean region has UNICEF offices in 24 countries, each of them developing important activities to promote and encourage constructive methods for enhancing the well-being and future of the region.

We commend UNICEF for its support for the Xchange Programme, which is gaining ground in many of the countries of the region. The programme aims to create a safe and protective environment for children and young people by helping them explore their creative side through dance, drama, music, sports and culture, exchanging negative attitudes of crime and violence for positive ones.

For 60 years, this organization has worked in many countries and territories, totalling today over 190 countries, in order to ensure the survival of children from childhood to adolescence. The countless stores of vaccines provided to developing countries, nutrition, water, sanitation, basic education and protective cover to children in fear of violence, exploitation and HIV/AIDS — all this is worthy of commendation. As Member States, we have a role to play in supporting the work of UNICEF, and in encouraging the involvement of the private sector in our respective countries.

The Member States of the Latin American and Caribbean Group take this opportunity to commend the staff of UNICEF and all contributors for their kind generosity over the years and look forward to their continued and increased support. For those who have given their lives in the service of the organization, we remember them and their families today. As was said of the late Patrick Macharia, the UNICEF staff member who lost his life in service to the organization only five days ago in Kenya, "He had a heart for children".

Congratulations, UNICEF, on a job well done. We wish the organization continued growth and success in the future.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands, Mr. Arjan Paul Hamburger, on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States.

Mr. Hamburger (Netherlands): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States, on behalf of which the Netherlands currently serves as Vice-President of the UNICEF Executive Board.

UNICEF, let us recall, was founded to address the needs of the children affected by the devastation of the Second World War. European children faced famine and disease. It was calculated that in Europe in 1947 the number of needy children amounted to 20 million. UNICEF hastened to help by providing food, clothing and health care. An international relief campaign for children of this magnitude had never been seen before. Maurice Pate, UNICEF's first Executive Director, made it a condition of his service that UNICEF would provide equal support to those in both vanquished and victorious countries.

Sixty years have passed since then. In that time, the work of UNICEF has become indispensable for the world's children. In the same room that brings us together today the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1959. In 1965, UNICEF received the Nobel Peace Prize. On accepting the prize, Henry Labouisse, then Executive Director of UNICEF, asked the following:

> "... is our society doing, or failing to do, all that is possible to equip our children with the weapons for peace? When our children grow up, will they have trained and informed minds, liberated from the old prejudices and hatreds? Will they trust their own civilization? Will they be prepared to trust and understand others"?

It is by answering these questions 40 years later that UNICEF continues to draw attention to those least able to defend themselves, not only by providing aid but also by giving them a voice. During the General

Assembly special session on children, young people from all Member States addressed the challenges and problems they faced. UNICEF's achievements in the past 60 years stand out for their universality and focus on the neediest and most neglected children.

We are especially glad to commemorate UNICEF since its history is so closely linked to our prosperity. It is the best example that shows that the future belongs to children. Sixty years ago, European children needed UNICEF. With the help of many Member States, UNICEF came to their rescue. Both contributions in kind, such as a large shipment of cod liver oil by the Government of Norway — which, by the way, brings back to me some bad childhood memories — and cash were provided by many Western nations. The war-affected children of Europe have now grown up to assist UNICEF in giving aid to millions of others. The people and Governments of the European and other members of our Group still provide the bulk of UNICEF's funding. We are committed to continuing that support and are proud to do so.

While commemorating the past and the successes achieved, we should also look ahead. UNICEF's work is of relevance to practically all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In putting the MDGs at the centre of its work, UNICEF can be a key factor in achieving them. Through its largely field-based operations, UNICEF has a unique and global presence. UNICEF's field staff are its principal ambassadors, and they deserve special mention today.

Looking ahead means learning from the past. We encourage the initiatives that are being taken to make the United Nations more coherent and efficient in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. UNICEF's success in the field is closely linked to partnerships with Governments, civil society and other United Nations entities. We know that UNICEF will continue its vital work through those partnerships, for the benefit of all the children of the world.

On behalf of our whole Group, I wish to conclude by warmly congratulating Executive Director Ann Veneman, her predecessors and all of UNICEF on its enormous achievements. We wish UNICEF every success in the future, especially in helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Richard Miller, representative of the United States, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Mr. Miller (United States of America): I am delighted to participate today in this celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Like many others in this Hall, I grew up along with UNICEF. As a young boy in Texas, on Halloween, when I was not asking for candy, I would go door to door, trick-or-treating for UNICEF. I actually learned very quickly that if you trick-or-treated for UNICEF, people would make a contribution and then give you the candy too. Collecting those nickels and dimes, I believed that UNICEF was one of our best hopes for the future. Today, thanks to the efforts of thousands of dedicated men and women, I still do.

For the people of the United States and for millions around the world, UNICEF is the United Nations organization that is most widely known and most universally admired. The outcomes of UNICEF's work are well known: lower child mortality, improved nutrition and health for children and mothers, reduction in disease, improved sanitation, better education for children and greater overall effectiveness in emergency situations. Even as we speak here today, around the world, UNICEF is providing relief to children in need and saving lives.

I am proud that the United States is the leading contributor to UNICEF. UNICEF is a very special organization. In a world where conflict is too often the norm, nothing brings us together like the welfare of our children. If we put children first, as UNICEF so often tells us to do, we will go a long way towards realizing our hopes and dreams for the future.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Andrei Dapkiunas, representative of Belarus and President of the Executive Board of UNICEF.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus): I have a confession to make: when it comes to UNICEF, I am hopelessly biased. As much as I appreciate the value of an impartial approach to the things that we deal with in the United Nations, I am happy to be utterly partial towards one of the greatest ideas, creations and accomplishments of the United Nations — ever.

I recall my first encounter with UNICEF. I was a young kid back then, and I saw a beautiful UNICEF postcard for the first time. But for many millions of children worldwide, the first encounters with UNICEF are less serene and far more consequential. For them,

UNICEF comes as a saviour; for them, UNICEF comes as a lifeline.

That lifeline was started by a decision of the General Assembly, taken 60 years ago. It is kept alive and strong by the caring attitude of big and smaller Government donors, thousands of private-sector contributors and individual good samaritans who selflessly give to save our future: our children.

As members of the General Assembly, to do justice to the major Government contributors whose support is essential in enabling UNICEF to effectively fulfil its honourable mandate, we might recall them today: the United States, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Japan, Finland, Italy, France, Switzerland, Ireland and Canada, to name just a few.

As Government representatives, we should explore every possibility of widening the circle of faithful Government contributors to UNICEF's resources. For UNICEF, no contribution is too small. And, as the emotions of the heart are no less important in the work of UNICEF than the calculations of the mind, please do not disregard the power of participating as a donor in the work of the Fund, no matter how insignificant or symbolic one's contribution might seem.

At this meeting, I have the honour to represent a collective governing body of UNICEF, the Executive Board. Much more than a body of simple bureaucratic oversight, the Board has acted for years as a unique and indispensable link between the greater General Assembly membership and the Fund.

I could say that vibrant and principled engagement and cooperation between the members of the Board and the Fund's management are among the key prerequisites for UNICEF's success. There is a continuous search within the Executive Board for better and best practices, sensible innovations and livelier procedures.

This year, among other things, we managed to organize an open, informal dialogue on the interrelated problems of children in countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Many delegations found that experiment to be successful, and we decided to continue it. I am glad to note that, during the first regular session of the Board, in 2007, a special focus will be given to the problems of the children of Africa.

Today, UNICEF is in good shape. Organizationally, logistically and in terms of the quality of the potential of its personnel, the Fund is fit to accomplish tasks of the utmost difficulty and complexity.

Both at its headquarters and in the field, UNICEF boldly and responsibly assumes the leading role among its partners when that is called for by the challenges of war, hunger and deprivation. Part of it comes with the name. But the bigger part comes with the strenuous and dedicated work of UNICEF staff.

The vision, energy and sense of purpose of Executive Director Ann Veneman are important factors that provide for greater cohesiveness of the work of the Fund and draw much well-deserved attention to its record, its methods and its experience of successful work.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to convey to all personnel of UNICEF our heartfelt congratulations and our wishes for every success in its important work. We will always be with the Fund — once with UNICEF, always with UNICEF. The Fund is truly a lifelong commitment. And let us keep it that way.

The Acting President: In accordance with a decision taken earlier, and without setting a precedent, I now give the floor to the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Ms. Ann Veneman.

Ms. Veneman (United Nations Children's Fund): It is a great pleasure to be here today as we mark the sixtieth anniversary of UNICEF and look to the future with hope and renewed energy in support of the world's children.

I appreciate so much everyone who has played a key part in the life of UNICEF, many of whom are here today. I would first like to thank our Executive Board President for his outstanding remarks this morning as well as for his leadership throughout the past year, as we have moved the work of UNICEF along. I also offer many thanks to all Executive Board members who are here today.

I especially want to thank and welcome here today my predecessor, Ms. Carol Bellamy, who has worked throughout the years tirelessly on behalf of children. We are also pleased to have with us today the

very talented UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, Vanessa Redgrave, and her son, Carlo Nero.

I would like to express many thanks to the Secretary-General, all of UNICEF's Goodwill Ambassadors, the National Committees, UNICEF staff and our many partners from around the world for their dedication, their commitment and their hard work on behalf of children.

I offer a very special thank you to someone the Assembly will hear from in a few minutes — 17-year-old Dolly Akter from Bangladesh, who has travelled all the way to New York to share her story with us. She is leading by example in showing the positive impact of empowering girls, especially through education.

We are here today to both celebrate the many accomplishments gained over the past 60 years and to build on the momentum of these successes while acknowledging that much more needs to be done to advance and protect the rights of children. The photographs and images we have seen in the film shown earlier today provide a powerful snapshot of the very personal and often painful stories behind the faces of the children.

UNICEF began in 1946 in the aftermath of the Second World War, working primarily in Europe and Japan to deliver emergency assistance to children in need. Over the years, UNICEF's work has expanded to include millions of children around the world, from Africa to Latin America, whose lives are affected by poverty, disease, conflict and emergencies. The world has seen more gains against poverty and more progress for children in the last 60 years than it saw in the previous 500.

Between 1960 and 2004, the mortality rates in developing countries for children under 5 years of age decreased on average from 222 deaths per 1,000 live births to 87 deaths per 1,000 live births. In the 1980s, the average rate of child immunization in most developing countries was between 10 and 20 per cent. Today, immunization with routine vaccines has reached more than 70 per cent of children worldwide. The world is now free of smallpox, the first major human disease to be eradicated. Where polio was once epidemic, extraordinary progress has been made and today some 175 countries are polio-free.

An estimated 1 billion more people have access to safe water today than in 1990. More children are in school now than ever before and disparities in enrolment between boys and girls are narrowing in most parts of the world. An estimated 70 per cent of all households in the developing world now consume iodized salt, which keeps millions of children safe from the risk of mental disability due to iodine deficiency.

The gender divide has narrowed around the world, with women gaining more power in the home, the workplace and the political sphere, which translates into gains for children. Healthy, educated mothers are more likely to have healthy, educated children who can lead productive lives and help accelerate development in their communities and in their countries.

But much remains to be done. We still live in a world in which more than 2 billion people live on $2 a day or less. We live in a world in which over 10 million children under the age of five die every year of causes that are largely preventable, such as disease and malnutrition. We live in a world in which natural disasters, exploitation, famine and hunger continue to undermine peace and stability. We live in a world where every minute, nine more people become HIV-positive, at least one of whom is a child under the age of 15.

Throughout my travels for UNICEF, I have witnessed many of the children's faces behind these numbers. I have met children who survived the genocide in Rwanda and learned of women who were targeted for rape by soldiers with HIV. I have visited with victims just days after the earthquake in Pakistan where hundreds of children died when their schools collapsed. I have seen mothers and babies in Malawi and other countries in Southern Africa who are dying of AIDS. I have spoken with children who were orphaned by the tsunami in India and Sri Lanka. I have met girls and women sold into brothels for someone else's gain and I have spoken with a 12-year-old orphan girl in the Democratic Republic of the Congo who was brutally raped by four men in an area where rape is used as a weapon of war.

These children, and millions like them, are the boys and girls who depend on our collective action. Children are at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals, from eradicating extreme poverty and hunger to achieving universal primary education and gender equality, to reducing child and maternal mortality and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, to ensuring environmental sustainability,

including clean water and sanitation, and developing a global partnership for development.

One woman who worked tirelessly to improve the lives of girls and boys around the world was UNICEF's Goodwill Ambassador, Audrey Hepburn. As a young girl, Ms. Hepburn herself received food and medical relief from UNICEF following the Second World War. Later in life, as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, Ms. Hepburn travelled throughout the world, from Latin America to Africa to Asia, touching the lives of millions of children through her work. She said, "I speak for those children who cannot speak for themselves, children who have absolutely nothing but their courage and their smiles, their wits and their dreams".

This sixtieth anniversary is a time to look back and to celebrate all that has been accomplished, and to recognize UNICEF's tremendous work on behalf of children. But it is also a time to acknowledge, as George Bernard Shaw said, that "we become wise not by remembering the past but by taking responsibility for the future". So, as we mark our sixtieth anniversary, we look to the future and to creating a collective will to improve the lives of children all around the world. Again, to use Ms. Hepburn's words, "there is no deficit in human resources ... only a deficit in human will".

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker for the special commemorative meeting of the Assembly devoted to the sixtieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund.

The General Assembly has thus concluded its special commemorative meeting devoted to the sixtieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund and this stage of its consideration of agenda item 58.

Before adjourning the meeting, I would like to invite delegates to remain seated, as immediately following the adjournment of this meeting, there will be an informal segment to hear a statement by a youth representative of Bangladesh.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.